

How has completion of the state's wetland inventory changed wetland protection in Michigan?

The Land and Water Management Division (LWMD), of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), is responsible for administering Michigan's wetlands protection program. When the state's wetland protection statute was passed in 1979, it included a statewide wetland inventory requirement. Until recently, the technology and funding to complete this statewide wetland inventory was not available. In 2002, the LWMD started a five year project to complete the wetland inventory with funding from the Great Lakes Protection fund. The LWMD certified to Director Steven E. Chester on January 1, 2007, that the wetland inventory has been completed.

Now that the wetland inventories are completed, under Part 303, Wetlands Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA 451, as amended (Part 303), all wetlands over five acres in size are regulated. This is a change in the type of wetlands that are protected under Part 303. In the past, wetlands that were not contiguous to a Great Lake, inland lake, stream, or pond were unprotected in counties with less than 100,000 people. Now all wetlands that are over five acres in size are protected in Michigan regardless of whether or not they are contiguous to a watercourse.

In addition to providing statewide uniformity in wetland regulation, completing the wetland inventory was also important for maintaining federal consistency in wetland regulation. Michigan is one of two states nationwide that has assumed the responsibility of administering wetland regulations under Section 404 of the Federal Clean Water Act. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has determined that the regulation of all wetlands over five acres in size is important for maintaining federal consistency in Michigan's Section 404 program.

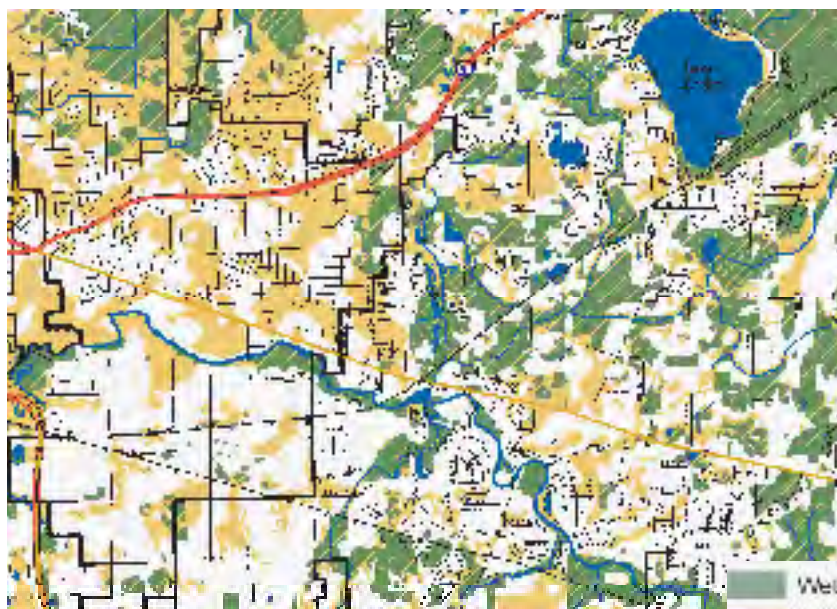


Figure 1. Sample Wetland Inventory Map of Ingham County, Michigan

Wetlands as identified on NWI and MIRIS maps
Soil areas which include wetland soils
Wetlands as identified on NWI and MIRIS maps and soil areas which include wetland soils

The wetland inventories (Figure 1) were created by compiling information from several sources. They have utilized soil surveys completed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and existing wetland mapping information, the National Wetland Inventory (NWI) by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Michigan Resources Inventory System (MIRIS) by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Although the inventories are not intended to define the specific location and boundary of a wetland, they are very useful as a tool for planning development and screening properties for approximate wetland locations. For example, prospective property buyers can now use the inventory to evaluate the likelihood their purchase will include wetland areas and the need for further review by a wetland professional.

The LWMD continues to provide a service for precise identification of wetland locations and boundaries through its Wetland Identification Program. This program includes the on-site review of a property necessary for precise identification of wetland boundaries. More information on the Wetland Identification Program is available on-line at www.michigan.gov/deqwetlands.

The wetland inventory maps have been distributed to each county's extension office, register of deeds office, and clerk office. Copies of the wetland inventory maps can also be viewed at the DEQ Web site at the Web address listed above. Look for the "Wetland Inventory Maps" link on the wetlands page. If paper copies of the wetland inventory map for your county are needed, an order form can be obtained through the same link.